

# OYSTER CATCHERS

SOME  
OF  
THE NEWS  
FROM  
HARBOR  
ISLAND  
NATURALLY

BY  
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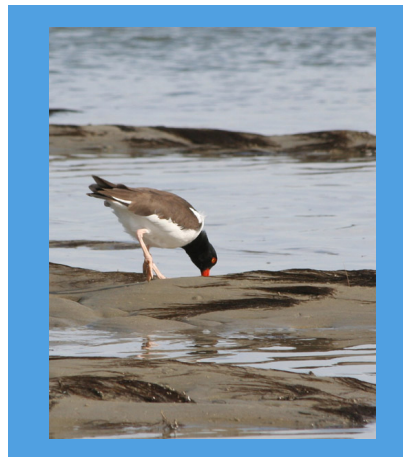
OYSTER CATCHERS DEVELOP LONG RELATIONSHIPS



## SURVIVAL SKILLS MUST BE TAUGHT TO THE YOUNG

### COLORFUL BIRDS THAT STAND OUT IN A CROWD.

These birds eat oysters, shrimp, worms, crabs and fish. Their name comes from their ability to open oysters quickly, often in under 30 seconds. They use their bills in two ways. One is to sneak up on an open oyster, stab with the bill before the oyster can snap shut, cutting the adductor muscles. (the muscles that are the hinge of the shell). The meat is then chiseled out. The other method is to loosen the oyster from its moorings with the bill. Short, sharp blows shatter one side of the shell. The bill is used to cut the adductors, and the shell is then pried apart.



These skills are taught to young who stay with the parents for a year.

Nests are scrapes in the sand where two or three eggs are laid. This year a pair has nested in one of our Least Tern colonies. Oyster Catchers protect their nests by trying to lead predators away from them. Nesting among the most pugnacious birds on the beach is most likely a coincidence, but the Terns seem to tolerate the intrusion and defend the nesting area.

Like most birds that nest on sandy beaches the numbers of these birds are decreasing. Staying away from the nesting areas and keeping dogs on leash are the best things we can do to assist them.

Sources: The Birder's Handbook by Paul Ehrlich, National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America 4th ed.



ON THE NEST



A NEST

All photographs are by John Albert

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HUNTING